



CONNECTING NEIGHBORS

MDOT I-75 Ambassador
Bridge Gateway Project

WELCOME

August, September, October 2008
Issue 7

This is the seventh edition of “Connecting Neighbors,” a newsletter designed to give you information about the MDOT I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project. Major construction has been under way since late February 2008. Take a look at “What’s Happening Now” to see what’s been completed and what still lies ahead. Need Michigan travel information? Read about the new Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center located in the heart of Mexicantown. Looking for more I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project information? Go to www.michigan.gov/gateway.

Former MDOT Director Honored As New Welcome Center Opens For Business



Former MDOT Director Gloria J. Jeff and MDOT Metro Region Engineer Greg Johnson look on as MDOT Chief Deputy Director Jacqueline Shinn unveils the Welcome Center plaque honoring Jeff.

Aug. 22 for a morning of music, Mexican food and speeches by state, local and community leaders as the Spanish-style building was dedicated to former MDOT Director Gloria J. Jeff. Jeff was the first woman and the first African American to head the state transportation department. A native of Detroit and a graduate of the University of Michigan, Jeff served as director from January 2003 to January 2006. Prior to that, she served as a deputy administrator of the Federal Highway Administration during the Clinton Administration.

Several speakers spoke at the event including Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano; MEDC Senior Vice President for Marketing and Communications Lisa Dancsok; Barbara Jean Johnson, director of Community Relations for the Governor’s Southeast Michigan Office; Macomb County Commissioner Joan Flynn and the Reverend Larry J. Bell of Vernon Chapel AME Church.

Speaking at the ceremony, MDOT Chief Deputy Director Jacqueline Shinn said, “The Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center is more than just a beautiful building. It is the tangible result of a successful state, regional and local partnership that will support tourism in southeast Michigan, drive the state’s economy, encourage local development and spur job creation.” Shinn then thanked a long list of public- and private-

The Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center is now open for business, offering visitors and tourists from across the state and around the world a brand new resource for learning about travel, entertainment and attractions in Michigan.

Located in southwest Detroit at the corner of Bagley Avenue and 21st Street near the Ambassador Bridge, the new facility is the state’s 14th Welcome Center and the first to be located within a major metropolitan area. The 5,000-square-foot Welcome Center is operated through a partnership of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Michigan Economic Development Corp. – Travel Michigan (MEDC). The new Welcome Center is expected to greet a significant portion of the millions of visitors and tourists who contribute more than \$17 billion annually to the state’s economy.

To celebrate the occasion, a crowd of approximately 500 supporters turned out on

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Mexicantown Community Development Corporation President Dr. Fern Espino accepts a citation from Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano on behalf of her organization.

sector partners who participated in the project.

“When coupled with the \$170 million that MDOT is investing in Michigan’s infrastructure and international border through the construction of the 1-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project,” said Shinn, “this building represents an immense investment in Michigan’s economic future. MDOT is especially honored to dedicate this important new facility to Gloria J. Jeff, who left her own stamp on many state, local, regional and national transportation projects.”

Shinn cited a short list of Jeff’s accomplishments. In 2003, Jeff played a key role in developing the GreenWays Initiative and creating a non-motorized pathway through Detroit’s Dequindre Cut, the path which allows pedestrians and bikers to travel to and from the Detroit River, the RiverWalk, Tri-Centennial Park, the Eastern Market and the Midtown

area. In 2004, Jeff brought the nation’s first Elderly Mobility conference to Detroit. She was the driving force behind the yearlong celebration of MDOT’s 100-year anniversary in 2005. Under her leadership, MDOT created a beautiful Gratiot Avenue gateway to help Detroit host the 2005 Major League Baseball All-Star Game and the 2006 Super Bowl. She was noted for operating a complete, integrated, transportation system for the people of Michigan and often reminded MDOT employees that, “We are more than just your father’s highway department.”

At the podium, Jeff thanked all assembled, then turned her attention to praising MDOT staffers for their passion and commitment to the people of Michigan and the state’s transportation system. As she ended her remarks, a jazz trio struck up a lively rendition of “Hail to the Victors.” Then, Shinn and MDOT Metro Region Engineer Greg Johnson unveiled the plaque that will hang in the new Welcome Center.

The dedication ceremony also celebrated the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation (MCDC), the neighborhood organization that played a key role in bringing the project to fruition. In 1992, MCDC submitted a plan to MDOT for creating a privatized joint-use facility to house a welcome center, office and retail space. In 2002, the group signed a memorandum of agreement with MDOT to build the Welcome Center and Mercado. The Mexicantown Mercado, a facility with retail space located across the street from the Welcome Center, opened in 2006. In addition to the tourist information center, the new Welcome Center building now houses a DTE Energy customer service center and several MDOT offices.



Guests take time to admire the new Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center which offers visitors information about attractions in southeast Michigan and throughout the state.



Michigan’s 14 Welcome Centers are operated through a partnership of MDOT and the Michigan Economic Development Corp. (MEDC). Lisa Dancsok, MEDC senior vice president for Marketing and Communications, spoke at the event.

“We wanted a project that would be in the community and of the community,” said MCDC Board President Dr. Fern Espino. “The Welcome Center and its benefits, including job creation, will be a shot in the arm for Mexicantown and southwest Detroit.”

The Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day. Like other state Welcome Centers, it will feature information on attractions throughout the state. For more information about the Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center, call 313-962-2360 or visit the Travel Michigan Web site at www.michigan.org.



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WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?



**The I-75 Ambassador Bridge
Gateway Project is more
than 60% complete.**

A critical one-mile section of I-96 from Warren Avenue to I-75 has been finished. (See story on page 4.) So what's next for the Gateway Project Team? Construction crews are focusing on building the interchange to the Ambassador Bridge, and reconstructing several bridges, including the Cass bridge over I-75 and the Joy and Maplewood bridges over I-96. Work continues on the signature Bagley Avenue Pedestrian Bridge that will reconnect the east and west sides of Mexicantown. As of this writing, the pylons and concrete portion of the bridge are complete and crews are preparing to work on the top portion of the structure.





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MDOT I-75 Ambassador
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Moving Forward: MDOT Opens Section of I- 96 Sooner than Expected

The I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project has passed another significant milestone. On Sept. 8, the hardworking project team completed and opened a one-mile section of I-96 from Warren Avenue to I-75. Work on this portion of the I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project began July 14 and was expected to reopen in mid-October. Instead, MDOT opened this section of I-96 one month ahead of schedule.

While reconstructing a short stretch of freeway might seem a relatively simple task, nothing could be further from the truth. "In addition to removing the entire section of old pavement and replacing it with new pavement, we reconnected the interchanges between eastbound I-96 and northbound I-75 and between southbound I-75 and westbound I-96," said Roger Teale, Metro Region resident engineer.

What does this mean for motorists? Teale continued, "Now you can access downtown Detroit traveling from eastbound I-96 to northbound I-75. This makes it much easier for people attending downtown activities and going to Comerica Park and Ford Field. You can also leave downtown via I-75 and take I-96 westbound to Livonia and other communities in that area."

"We've had quite a few motorists tell us that they like the improvements that we've made along I-96 and everyone on the Gateway Project Team really appreciates hearing that," said Brenda V. Peek of MDOT Communications. "We also appreciate everyone's patience as we continue work on this important project."